"The Train-Hunt at Loldos"

21685

The Black Cat

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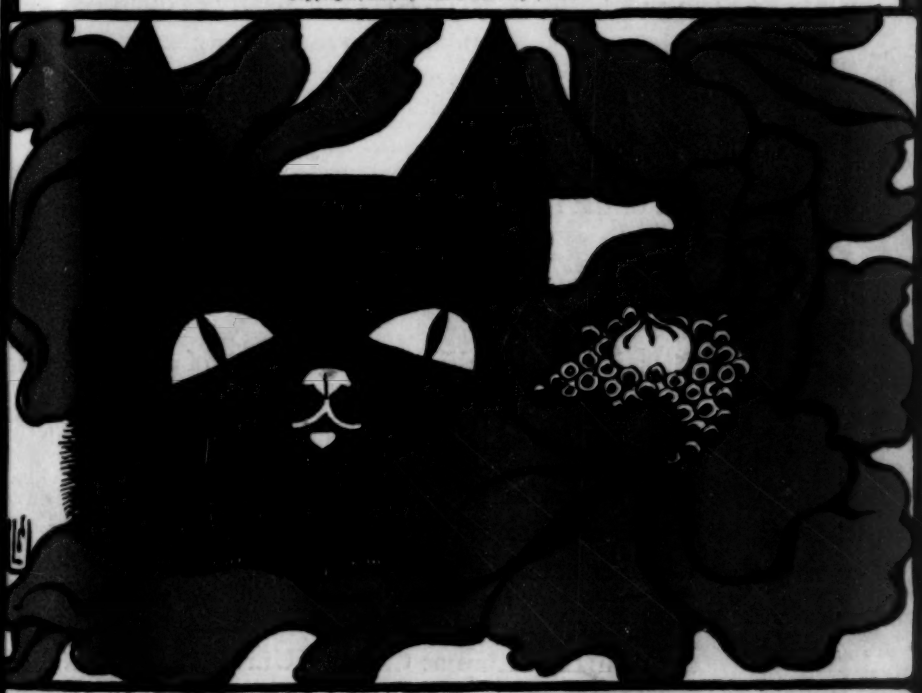

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The Train Hunt at Loldos.
$200 Prize Story.
E. C. Preston.

The Revolving Head.
John Regnault Ellyson.

The Story that Cured His Wife.
C. A. Stearns.

The Golden Dryad.
Alexander Black.

The Mist in the Valley.
Virginia M. Cornell.

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5 Complete Stories 5

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Miss Katharine Lee Bates, Professor of English Literature at Wellesley College and a writer of note.

Professor Wm. Vaughn Moody, Professor of English Literature at Chicago University.

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The Black Cat

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The Train Hunt at Loldos.*

BY E. C. PRESTON.

"WHERE is the Midnight Express?" So ran the query sent by the operator at Loldos to the operator at Espaco.

"Train passed on schedule time," flashed back over the wires.

The Buenos Ayres, Concepción and Valdivia Railway was completed in 1899. The greater part of the line traverses the level pampas, where the construction of a roadway is not difficult, but in order to surmount the obstacle which the Andes created it had been found necessary to pierce the range with a tunnel. It had been constructed through six miles of solid rock. The tunnel, which is like most others in general features of design, is unique in one particular — it has a sharp curve near its western exit. Trains passing through it from east to west travel almost due west for more than five miles, then turn sharply to the right and leave the tunnel headed a little west of north. The point where the road-bed leaves the tunnel on the Pacific side is far up the mountain, and because of the precipitous character

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $200 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

of the slope a descent can be begun in no other direction. During the construction of the tunnel, rocks of a very shaly nature had been encountered in the vicinity of the curve, and to prevent the constant falling of small pieces upon the track the sides and upper part of the tunnel had been encased in sheet-iron. This encasement had been put on in sections, each about sixty feet in length.

About three miles from the eastern entrance to the tunnel the town of Espaco is situated. Its population is composed chiefly of shiftless, indolent natives, who take no thought of the morrow, their chief interest having recently centred in a stranger who had come into their midst. He was a scientist, and was conducting experiments with wireless telegraphy. A colleague was located on the western side of the mountain, at the hamlet of Loldos, and they were ascertaining the effect which the mountain range had upon the transmission of the current. Loldos nestles among the mountains about a mile to the north of the tunnel. Its population consists of about fifty ignorant mountaineers, more thriftless than those of Espaco, and the oldest inhabitant had never heard of a railroad until the route for one was surveyed through their little village.

The Midnight Express leaves Espaco at 11.34 and is due at Loldos at 12.03. It makes no stop at the latter place unless signalled. On the night of March 19, 1900, a lone traveller occupied the waiting room of the station. He had purchased a ticket for Concepción. A few minutes before the express was due the night operator hung out the signal for the train to stop. Twenty minutes later he sent the message with which this story opens.

A half-hour elapsed, and the operator began to fear that the train had meet with some disaster. He stepped out upon the platform and gazed along the track. No approaching light indicated its coming. He re-entered the office and attempted to read, but the train, and not the printed page, occupied his thoughts. In a short time he arose, looked at his watch, then seated himself by his instrument and sent the following dispatch to the division headquarters at Concepción: "Express left Espaco on time; has not arrived at Loldos; fifty minutes overdue." In a few minutes he received the reply: "Order out section men to investigate."

The section men were called and soon departed on a hand-car in the direction of the tunnel.

An hour and a half later the following telegram was received from Espaco: "Section men arrived; report track unobstructed; saw nothing of express."

The operator was dumfounded. Certainly an error had been made in transmitting or receiving the message. He called for it to be repeated. The receiver clicked off the identical words of the first report.

Without pausing to theorize concerning the disappearance of the train, the operator forwarded the intelligence to Concepción. The division superintendent at once dispatched a wrecker to Loldos, and sent orders to Espaco for the section men to return slowly to Loldos, and to carefully scan the ground outside of the tunnel for some distance to each side of the track. "Queer how they could miss seeing the wreck," he remarked to an operator, "No matter how high the embankment down which it plunged."

It was broad daylight when the wrecker arrived at Loldos. A few minutes later the hand-car appeared in sight. Upon its arrival the section hands were eagerly questioned. They reported having seen nothing of the train. The announcement was received with a shout of derision. "Where are your eyes?" cried one of the wrecker crew. "Come boys, move on! We will soon locate the express!"

The wrecker was set in motion, and the crew kept a diligent lookout for the missing train. Wherever it might have plunged, they were sure they could not fail to discover it. They proceeded slowly. They reached the tunnel, and no train had been visible; they emerged from the other side and proceeded leisurely into Espaco, and the express had not been found!

When the division superintendent was apprised that the train could not be found he ordered the swiftest engine that the company possessed to be coupled to the officials' private car, and soon the president, vice-president, general superintendent and several directors of the road were speeding toward the scene of the strange disaster. Arrived at Loldos, they proceeded slowly over the track to Espaco. Nothing significant escaped their eyes, yet their quest was fruitless.

From the office at Espaco the general superintendent sent queries to every station on the system. The telegraph operators were asked to give information concerning the present location of the train, but none of them could help the puzzled superintendent solve the problem.

The officials decided that the train must have become uncontrollable and run wild past Loldos, unnoticed, and that the wreck could be found at the bottom of some embankment beyond. It was not probable that a train could leave a grade without tearing up the track, and they had already passed over that section of the railway, yet such a contingency was more plausible than that it had melted into air. Accordingly forces of searchers were ordered out on all parts of the system. For two days the search went on, but no clue to the missing express could be discovered. Then the railway officials, despairing of success, ordered the search to be abandoned.

News of the disaster spread rapidly throughout Chile and Argentina. Newspapers devoted almost their entire space to the facts and theories concerning the mystery; people neglected their business and collected in crowds upon the streets to discuss the unwonted phenomenon; the wise shook their heads gravely and admitted that they could give no intelligent explanation of the enigma; the masses ignored science and attributed the deed to spirits, elves and goblins, for here was something unparalleled in all the annals of history, which defied science and set all her known laws at naught. A wave of superstition swept over the country, and prelate and layman, scholar and illiterate stepped back in belief a thousand years.

Relatives of the passengers who had disappeared on the train sent letters, telegrams and messengers, or came in person to the offices of the company to learn what had been done and what would be done.

The Bolivian minister at Santiago was reported among the missing, and his home government sent a polite message to the Chilean government requesting it to ascertain if the report were authentic.

By the morning of the 22d, excitement had been wrought to a high pitch. The wildest rumors spread from mouth to

mouth, and the most preposterous were given credence. The Valdivia *El Rio* came forth with the startling headlines:

> **Gas Issues Intermittently from Tunnel.**
>
> **Train Filled with it and Soared Away.**
>
> **Man Found who Saw it Sail High Above the Mountains and Disappear.**

Impossible as was the fabrication, it found believers.

Meanwhile the report leaked out, what was supposed to be simply a private calamity might become one of national moment, for the Chilean government had lost $500,000, which had been in transportation on the train. The party in power had endeavored to keep this secret, for political reasons, but it had been published in the papers of Argentina, from which it was copied by those of Chile. The gold standard party had gained control of the government by a very narrow margin at the last general election, and had proceeded to place the country on a gold basis. It had been known in the inner political circles for several months that the diplomatic relations with Brazil were in a strained condition. The leaders in Brazil were jealous of the political influence which Chile exerted in South America and wished to humble the latter country and at the same time make their own the dominant power. They only awaited a trivial pretext which would make the declaration of war appear justifiable in the eyes of the civilized world. Their fleet was manœuvring in the South Atlantic and within twenty-four hours could dash around the Horn and begin to devastate the Chilean coast. The President of Chile had called Congress in extra session in January, and it had voted to greatly increase the efficiency of the army and navy, and had directed that a loan of $20,000,000 should be negotiated. This had been secured in London, and $18,000,000 had already been received by a transfer of credit, while the remaining $2,000,000 had been forwarded in four equal shipments, one of which had been lost on the missing train. This $2,000,000 consisted of ingots of gold which it was the intention of the government to convert into coin to swell the circulatory medium of the country. The B. A. C. & V. Road had the contract to forward all the gold from Buenos Ayres to Concepción, from whence it would be transported to Santiago over the Chilean Central.

When the leaders of the party of the opposition heard of the loss of the treasure, they denounced the party in power in scathing language for their careless policy in allowing the gold to be transported without a suffcient guard to ensure its safety. The ranks of the opposition had been restless for some months, and now the inflamed condition of the popular mind allowed the spirit of insurrection to materialize, and before evening the masses were in a ferment.

The sun went down on a country filled with gloom and dark forebodings; Grief sat in the homes from which the missing had been snatched; Mediæval Superstition grasped the throat of Enlightenment with a throttling clutch, and the sinister form of Anarchy stalked the streets.

At midnight the express, bearing fourteen passengers and the second consignment of gold, was seen to enter the tunnel. It failed to come out on the other side!

At sunrise the general superintendent of the road and twenty men entered the tunnel. All trains were stopped while they made a systematic examination of the entire structure for the purpose of discovering how the trains had disappeared. For eight hours they carefully examined the track, the side walls and the upper vault. Everything appeared in proper condition, and not an atom of the missing train came to their notice.

When news of the second calamity reached the public, excitement rose to a fever heat. After the first disaster the loss of the money had been looked upon as simply a coincident feature. Now that another half million had been lost in transportation with the second mystery, and as no large amount of precious metal had been handled by the railway at any other time, the consensus of opinion was that the gold was responsible for the mishaps.

The desire for gold is a human attribute. When the public comprehended the connection between the yellow metal and the mysteries, many who had looked upon the supernatural as the cause of the mishaps changed their opinion, and considered the disasters to have been brought about by brigands. No one could offer a plausible plan, however, by which man could bring to consummation a plot for the apparent annihilation of a train, and the belief

of the general public in the supernatural origin of the catastrophies only strengthened.

The business of the railroad company was completely paralyzed. During the 23d and 24th not a person asked for a ticket for passage through the tunnel. The company received orders from those who had large shipments of freight in transportation not to allow their goods to enter the mountain until the mystery was solved. The road became in reality two systems, each terminating in the Andes. The trainmen shared the prevalent superstition and none were required to enter the tunnel after the superintendent and party had made the investigation within it.

During the afternoon of the 24th word came to the main office of the system at Concepción that the third consignment of gold had arrived at Espaco. It was ordered placed under a heavy guard, and a meeting of the officials and directors of the road was called to consider plans for forwarding it to Santiago. Some favored returning it by rail to Buenos Ayres, and sending it by steamer around the Horn. This was promptly overruled, because hostilities with Brazil might begin at any moment, and the fleet of the enemy would seize and confiscate all Chilean treasure in transportation around the Horn. Others favored conducting it through a mountain pass on the backs of llamas. The general superintendent would listen to no such plan. "Gentlemen," he said to the assembled directors of the company, "we have brought the gold thus far, and the Buenos Ayres, Concepción & Valdivia is a company that can carry its plans to their consummation. We will proceed through the tunnel with the gold!"

The superintendent had always been a materialist and was not willing to concede that the supernatural had any connection with the mystery. He knew that a band of brigands had infested the mountain for years, although their rendezvous was supposed to be at a considerable distance from Espaco, and he believed that in some way they were responsible for the disappearance of the trains. He accordingly decided upon a plan for the transfer of the gold through the tunnel whereby he thought to be able to checkmate the plans of the shrewdest desperadoes. He ordered three engines, each with a coach, to be sent to Espaco. Before their arrival he had collected one hundred and fifty men to act as

guards for the trains. Upon the arrival of the engines and coaches, he without a moment's delay ordered fifty men into each car and placed the gold in the coach of the central train. He gave instructions that the trains should proceed at the rate of ten miles an hour until the tunnel was passed, and that an approximate distance of half a mile should be maintained between them. Then the start was made.

It was 4.32 on the afternoon of the 25th when engine No. 68 pulled out of Espaco; three minutes later No. 22 moved off, and as it did so the general superintendent swung himself into the cab and stood beside the engineer, Jack Steele, a veteran railroader from the United States who had pulled a passenger on the Great Northern in the early nineties. Last of all to depart was the 63. As it left the village a great shout went up from the assembled spectators. The crowd stood watching the trains until the last one had gone from view, then it thronged within and around the station, feverishly awaiting the time when a message from Loldos should announce the result of the trip. Not a man withdrew from its midst except the scientist, who returned to his experiments with wireless telegraphy.

In the meantime, news that another trial to forward gold through the tunnel was about to be made spread in the vicinity of Loldos, and a throng of people gathered around the exit on the Pacific side; 5.20 had passed, and there was no sign of an approaching train. "It is about time for one to appear," said one. "Mark my words, none of them will ever come forth," said another. The watchers standing within the mouth of the tunnel saw the faint glimmer of a light far within its depths. "A light! a light! one rounds the curve!" went up the cry. The light came nearer and a glow suffused the cavern walls, advancing until its foremost beams embraced the mellowed daylight stealing inward from the outer world.

The crowd hurried from the track, and soon an engine and coach emerged from the mountain's side. A great shout went up from the waiting assemblage. As it died away a man again peered into the tunnel. "Another light! another train!" he cried. Then all was tumult and rejoicing, and as the train came forth every throat spoke forth anew with loud huzzas, until it seemed as if the

very mountain trembled with the thunderous acclaim, while the echoes swelled the chorus until the whole district reverberated.

After the crowd had spent its energy it once more fixed its attention on the exit. Minutes elapsed, and no train appeared. Men who had stood in the opening gazing at the inner depths glanced furtively about, then withdrew and lost themselves within the throng; exultation ebbed away, and apprehension soon replaced it; chattering voices ceased their gossip, and a hush of silence fell upon the watchers; an hour dragged out its dismal length; the shades of night began to fall; superstition fostered fear; then the whole multitude, seized by a sudden panic, fled precipitately down the mountain side and never halted till it reached the huts of Loldos.

Ere this the throng at Espaco had heard the result. At 5.28 came the message: "68 and coach arrived." Again at 5.34: "63 on siding." A tremor went through the crowd and the people looked at one another with white faces. No. 22 had disappeared, with the superintendent and the gold!

Within two hours the news was known at every telegraph station in South America. The great dailies rushed forth special editions containing sensational accounts of the affair. The mystery had been enacted during the hours of daylight, and almost under the eyes of a special guard. The masses became, more than ever, a prey of distorted fancy. Superstition tightened its grip upon the nation. Gold was everywhere looked upon as a menace to public safety. No one would have been surprised if the banks, with their vaulted hoards of gold, had vanished completely from the earth. That night, misers with shrivelled souls, whose chief delight had been to gloat over their glittering treasure, were loath to approach its place of concealment, and feared as they tossed upon their beds that the grewsome power that sought for gold would snatch them from among the living.

The leaders of the opposition had asked the government to send a regiment for the purpose of protecting the third consignment of gold during its passage through the tunnel. The authorities dared not comply, as one-half of the tunnel is located in Argentina, and to send a regiment into the territory of the neighboring republic would be equivalent to a declaration of war. The

opposition took no heed of the point involving international etiquette, and used the refusal for political capital.

The next day insurrection seemed imminent in every quarter. A mob gathered in Santiago and was dispersed at the point of the bayonet. In Valparaiso ten thousand men marched in one parade, bearing aloft banners inscribed: "Death to misgovernment!" From Serena, Valdivia, Concepción, and lesser towns came news of incendiary gatherings. All that seemed lacking to precipitate a revolution was a commander to lead the hordes of agitators forth to battle.

Then trouble came from an unexpected quarter — the Bolivian government refused to give credence to the report that its representative at Santiago was among the missing, and maintained a belief that he was imprisoned in some Chilean bastile. It issued an ultimatum, setting forth that if he was not liberated within twenty-four hours, war would be declared. Brazil immediately espoused the cause of Bolivia, and a message was sent by wire from Rio Janeiro to Santa Cruz, where the dispatch boat of her fleet was coaling, for the squadron to set sail at once for Valdivia. Without waiting for the expiration of the twenty-four hours of grace, Bolivia began sending regiments post-haste to the frontier. The province of Atacama, wrested from Bolivia by Chile as indemnity after a recent war, contains a large element of population which is Bolivian at heart. It added to the general perplexity of the situation by breaking into open revolt.

Before the expiration of the twenty-four hours, the Chilean government secured an extension of time until 4 P. M. of the 28th.

On the morning of the 28th a skirmish took place at Anatuco between a small rebel force and a detachment of regulars. The government forces were put to flight. It was reported at Santiago that the revolutionary forces had a leader and that a decisive blow would be struck on the morrow. It appeared as if at least two-thirds of the population would join the revolutionists. The Bolivian officials were in most excellent spirits. They foresaw that with their own country and Brazil pitted against her, and with a formidable insurrection at home, Chile must meet with defeat; and already they saw their own country avenged for the war of 1880 and Atacama once more a Bolivian province, and they

thought seriously of demanding the surrender of the remainder of Chile as far south as the province of Aconcagua.

At 10 A. M. the President of Chile received word that the fourth shipment of gold was in port at Buenos Ayres. He sent orders to the president of the railway company to have it deposited in the vaults of the corporation, there to remain indefinitely.

At 11 A. M. it was reported that the Brazilian fleet was moving along the western coast of Chile. The government at Santiago ordered the Chilean fleet to put to sea and give it battle before it could reach and bombard Valdivia.

Shortly before noon the little town of Espaco in Argentina was thrown into a state of the wildest commotion. An engine and coach were seen backing with furious speed down the steep grade leading from the tunnel to the town. The coach was before the engine. Something seemed to be fluttering and dangling over its forward end. As the train drew nearer it became apparent that it was an immense strip of sheet-iron like that in the tunnel. The engine and coach came to a standstill and the engineer stepped off. It was none other than Jack Steele, and the engine was the No. 22. Within the coach were the three missing half millions of gold. Every ingot had been returned, but the passengers were not on board.

Jack Steele told a story of strange experiences, which was, in substance, thus:

The band of brigands who infested the region had had their headquarters in a cave in the western part of the mountain. From thence they had made their sallies to plunder the defenceless. It happened that when the tunnel was constructed it passed very near this cave, and would have entered it had not the curve been made. While it was being constructed the brigands could hear the noise of the workmen. After it was completed they excavated through the few rods of remaining rock so that nothing but the sheet-iron encasement separated the track from their compartment. They did their work at night. They loosened the rivets at both ends of a section of sheet-iron and hung it by rollers on a track. This track was on the inner side, so that nothing could be noticed from the tunnel. The trackway held the section in its natural place, and there was nothing to reveal that it had been

tampered with, except the rivets. Within the cavern they laid a track which was made to connect with the railway at the point where the curve began. For a considerable distance it was laid in a straight direct extension of the westerly course of the railroad. When the robbers desired to capture a train they moved the section of sheet-iron on its rollers to the west and slid a short stretch of track into place. The rails of this track narrowed down to a point in vertical extension at the east and were clamped to the top of the roadway's rails. Several men could perform the labor required in less than a minute, and in thirty seconds after a train was past everything could be re-arranged in natural position. In approaching this trap an engineer would notice nothing wrong until it was too late to stop, and when the train was finally brought to a standstill retreat would no longer be possible.

Thus the three trains had been captured, and the robbers expected to obtain the fourth consignment of gold in like manner if forwarded through the tunnel.

They treated their captives well and announced to them that when the $2,000,000 was secured they would divide their spoils and abandon brigandage. As soon as that was done the captives would be restored to liberty, and would be sent out into the world on the trains on which they left it. During their enforced sojourn with their captors they were confined in a remote portion of the cavern, into which they had been lowered down over a precipice by means of ropes. Food and water were doled out to them at intervals, and a few lanterns were placed at their disposal.

Escape from this depression seemed impossible, but Jack Steele had managed to scale the cliff. After that he proceeded with great caution lest he should be discovered. He found the entrance through the encasement to the tunnel and was about to pass through and carry the tidings to the world that the missing trains could be recovered, when he overheard a conversation which caused him to change his plans. From it he gleaned that the robbers had learned that the last half million of gold would not pass through the tunnel, and that they were about to divide the plunder already secured. They had placed it all in one car, where they were about to weigh it, ingot by ingot. They had started a fire in one of the engines, with which they intended to move the coach

containing the treasure to a more convenient place for the unloading of the gold after its apportionment.

Steele realized that if the gold were to be saved he must act at once. He shoved back the sheet-iron and placed the track in connection, then cautiously made his way to within a hundred feet of where the steaming engine stood. It was the 22. There he waited for many minutes; he dared not move closer lest he enter the circle of light from the lanterns of the desperadoes. He could hear their conversation and saw them engaged in weighing the bars of gold. At last an angry altercation arose among the men standing on the other side of the car; the weighing ceased and all left the coach and gathered around the ones engaged in dispute. That was his opportunity. Stealing forward, he entered the cab, shoved the lever forward to the last notch, and pulled the throttle wide open. The engine quickly started and had gone two rods before the brigands realized what had happened. Then they started in pursuit. They reached the engine and attempted to mount the cab, but each one who made the spring received a blow from the shovel and fell back. Thus Jack Steele beat off all his assailants until the engine on the steep down-grade outstripped the fleetness of their feet. When the place of exit was reached there was a crash, and he beheld the section of sheet-iron clinging to the coach. The two men whom he had heard conversing must have been returning and reached the entrance too late to disconnect the tracks, but in time to hurl the sheet-iron across the opening. It was evident that they had hoped to cause a wreck in order to save the gold, but their efforts did not succeed.

Once in the tunnel, the run to Espaco was uneventful.

The story spread like wild-fire throughout the country. General Perez, who was stationed with a battalion in a town twenty miles to the west of the tunnel, recognized that the cavern was in Chilean territory and dispatched a regiment by rail to subdue the robbers and liberate the captives. When they arrived they found that the former had fled, and the latter were hoisted by ropes over the precipice. While on their way back to the entrance they discovered an instrument for the transmission of messages by wireless telegraphy. This solved the mystery of how the brigands knew just which trains to capture. The self-styled scientists had been

in league with the desperadoes, and, obtaining the information in Espaco, had transmitted it to the tunnel. When the party reached the outside a search was instituted for the scientists, but they were not found.

At 2.05 P.M., the Bolivian minister stepped into the railway office at Loldos and sent a message to his home government apprising it of his liberty and verifying the former reports of the Chilean government. The limit of the truce had not expired, and all pretext for the institution of hostilities was removed.

The news that the mystery of the tunnel had been solved and that war with Bolivia and Brazil had been averted was soon known in every important city of the republic. The masses awoke, as if from a nightmare, to a realization of the folly of their position, and in the general revulsion of popular sentiment even the insurrectionists were swallowed up. The restoration of the gold brought confidence to the money market and the financial world began to recover from its panic. On the morning of the 30th the sun arose over a country apparently as peaceful and prosperous and certainly less superstitious than it had ever been before.

The Revolving Head.*

BY JOHN REGNAULT ELLYSON.

THE miserable-looking creature must have fallen asleep as he sat by the mile-stone on the edge of the road. Culberson, in fact, did not see him until he uncoiled his slim figure and rose like a spectre above the low tangle of vine and bramble. The sound of Culberson's footsteps must have startled him greatly, for as soon as he gained his feet he fell again upon his knees, his hands lifted in mute appeal.

Scarcely more than half clad in shreds and patches, he looked the image of adversity. The attire proclaimed the tramp, yet surely the meekest of the roving fraternity, and the face — sunburnt, thickly bearded, full of dust and grime — had yet a scholarly cast. It was pinched and pathetic, and the tears and the wofully hungry look proved irresistible to Culberson, who put his hand in the back pocket where he carried his loose coin.

As though that hand had touched a spring somewhere in the tramp, he made a most extraordinary movement — a movement that raised him at once in his observer's esteem to the rank of an unrivalled mime.

It was a movement of the head — glancing backward, sidewise and forward again — swiftly and eagerly, while the body and limbs, meanwhile, remained completely at rest. Only the head moved, but that seemed to turn around a dozen times in as many seconds, twirling like a ball on a well-oiled socket.

The performance would have astonished its beholder, even in a side show, and on a quiet country road it was more than astonishing. Culberson stepped back a few paces and caught his breath. He had seen an owl turn its head till he thought it would twist it off, but never a man. The strange oscillations continued rapidly, until the sight made the observer dizzy. Then he said:

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"There, that will do, thank you — that is quite enough!"

But the motion of the man's head did not cease. Culberson raised his cane and advanced with a threatening motion, when the stranger sobbed out:

"Oh, I mean no harm. Don't you see I can't help it? I only ask your pity."

Culberson paused.

"Is this really no ingenious stage trick?"

"Indeed no, I assure you, sir. I am no buffoon — only the most luckless dog on all the byways of the world — one who lurks in solitude and dodges every passing shadow, and trembles as the leaves tremble!"

The gentleman rested upon his cane and stared.

"Tell me, then," he said in a softer voice, "what it is that stirs you so powerfully and so strangely."

"It is that worst of fears — the fear of being caught unawares — the fear of coming face to face with those I have eluded for many a year."

As he spoke he held his hands to the sides of his head, as though to steady that restive member.

Culberson was a man of the world, and asked no further question. It must be a weighty crime, he thought, to so shatter a strong man's nerve.

"Come, old fellow," he said, "you talk well, and I like your face. Shake off your fear, get on your feet, pluck up some spirit!"

The tramp arose, brushed the thickest of the dust from his knees with his ragged hat, and gathered his tatters about him. His countenance brightened as the gentleman pointed to a little white cottage nestling among the green shrubbery of a hill-top.

"It's a quiet place," Culberson said, "and in fair weather like this I take my meals under that oak, where one has a view of the only path by which the point is reached. You see the advantage of the position!"

"Aye, I see," replied the vagrant, grimly. "People can't drop upon you suddenly!"

"Exactly! So, if you see fit, we'll go up there, where you may sit at your ease and eat something, and rest for an hour or so."

"How good of you," murmured the stranger; "how very kind."

Seated under the oak on the hill-top, with a small table laden with cold chicken, fruit and other things before him, the man with the revolving head ate as if it were his last repast, while his host mixed cracked ice, mint and whiskey in a large glass as only it is mixed in Virginia. The eyes of the tramp sparkled and moistened as this delectable compound was set within his reach, but he did not touch it till the luncheon was finished, and then he sipped it sparingly, with appreciative relish.

"Bourbon," he said, "real old Kentucky — and the best! It's years since I tasted such, but one never loses his taste — whatever else has gone!"

"Will you smoke?" enquired Culberson, drawing a cigar from his case.

"I can't refuse," he said, with the accent of refinement, "though — "

Just then a very common incident occurred in Culberson's poultry yard, some distance behind them. A pullet, having laid an egg, made the customary note of it, and her solo was, as usual, reinforced by the whole feathered chorus.

The hand extended for the cigar dropped limply to the stranger's side; again he sank to his knees, trembling in every limb, and his singular head seemed to rotate as if set upon a pivot.

"Really, you must pardon me," he exclaimed as he regained his seat and his composure. "But it was so — well, so very reminiscent!"

"Indeed!" answered his entertainer, with curiosity doubly aroused concerning the peculiar malady, for he could not otherwise regard it, of the cultured tramp. "May I venture to ask more definite particulars of your misfortune?"

"How can I refuse you anything, you — you are so kind!"

And the wanderer of the highways, lighting his cigar, tossed off the last sip from the tall glass, and, leaning back in his chair, began his narrative in a style befitting one who, while he may not have been a mountebank, could hardly have been always a very serious person.

"Though I cut a sorry figure now, sir," he said, "I was once a man of affairs. Money came to me by inheritance, and I made

money. I was flattered and courted, and numbered my friends by the score. I adored my wife, and kept at my own expense the whole flock of her relatives. I make no boasts — I'm dealing in facts.

"My wife was the handsomest woman in the world — accomplished and clever also. Blessed with a genial nature myself, I believe, I gave my wife the reins, and did not refuse to join her in her follies and caprices, for she had her caprices — like other women — but unlike them in originality. They were never scandalous, though people gossipped. Some said that I had no initiative; others that I had lost whatever individuality I once possessed. However, I was charmed with my choice, full of confidence in her and sure of her applause. And so I was happy.

"Had not she, the regal one, favored me above all other men? At the last, as between Bradford, the artist, and myself, had she not jilted him and taken me? And yet any woman might well have chosen him. He was extremely bright, had many talents besides his art, and had made a high mark in that. He was uncommonly eccentric, every one will admit, and in many of his ways carried eccentricity to the point of grotesqueness, but his great gifts none could deny.

"I retained my liking for him for twenty years, during which my wife lost nothing of her vivacity, none of her charms — nor any of her relatives. They increased, rather. To the sister who was to be her home companion in my hours of absence was soon added another sister. Then the venerable father and mother came to sit by our fireside. They were of a hardy and vigorous stock. An uncle and two brothers, one by one, joined the family circle, and the advent of each of the later accessions was signalized by more or less friction with the earlier comers. I have said that my wife possessed remarkable vitality. It was on such occasions, and at other times when affairs didn't glide with satisfactory smoothness, that this abounding vitality seemed to react against the nervous centres and dominate my wife like a veritable tempest. My wife's relatives resembled her in this characteristic, and I — well, as an intelligent being, I was obliged, as the years went and the relatives came, to neutralize this excess of vital force by a judicious system of correlative energy. For example, if occa-

sion compelled, I pitted my wife or one of the servants against one or more of the relatives, and escaped the storm myself by slipping into some corner under cover, where I often witnessed rare comedies in real life, at the mere cost of some china and bric-à-brac, of which the house was full. I could afford luxuries in those days, and my wife was a fine judge of such matters. When a woman comes within an ace of wedding an artist — an eccentric one — she is sure to have an exceedingly nice sense of color and form. She'll furnish the house with taste, decorate it admirably and fill it with choice and dear-bought vases and bronzes — marbles and paintings and tapestries. Her people approved. In candor, I must say that they were no mean critics.

"Now, perhaps you'll know what I mean when I say that I managed to live twenty years in the midst of life's blessings — and my wife's kin — and only once brought down the temple about my ears. Only once, but —

"Well, let me tell you how it happened. An agreeable project took my fancy concerning my wife's approaching birthday. Straightway I consulted Bradford. I let him into the scheme because I couldn't work it without him. My idea amused him immensely, but he seemed to hesitate. I urged, cajoled, named a good sum — and secured his services.

"I was to procure my wife's full-length portrait — painted by Bradford himself — under the pretext that the artist declared that it needed retouching, and he, with a shapely model who posed for him, was to depict my wife at full length as Juno, in the purest classic style. The details I left to him. I've said that he was an eccentric man, and I think I have stated it moderately. For instance, he seldom permitted his pictures to be viewed until completed, even by his closest friends. Knowing this, I of course was not surprised when he coolly told me that I should not see the portrait till he himself unveiled it in my chamber on my wife's birthday.

"My plans went well. I got the picture, bulky as it was, into my apartment unobserved. I hoodwinked my wife's people and felt confident of springing upon them all a profound surprise. My wife made a partial discovery when she saw the large frame, covered with a double thickness of burlap, stitched securely at the

edges, but she did not seem to connect it in any way with her own portrait. I owned that it was a masterpiece by Bradford, who had reserved the privilege of unveiling it himself.

"The eventful night came — the night of nights. My wife's kinsfolk, of course, were always with us. A chosen few, the pick of her friends, gathered for the occasion. But the artist didn't arrive. However, that was simply his way — he was always late. But when an hour passed, two hours, and he was still absent, I was much annoyed. I felt that he had forfeited the privilege for which he had stipulated, as I could not keep the invited guests waiting all night in ignorance of the delayed surprise.

"So, dropping a hint of what was to come, I led the way into the — yes, the fatal — chamber, drew the drapery from the curtained recess, mounted the ladder that stood beside it, and prepared to uncover the picture. Not for years had I appeared more fully myself. My eyes and neck — accustomed by long practice to act independently, almost with contrariety, in watching the trajectory of a flying ornament or calculating the angle of incidence of a bursting vase — had never seemed more unanimous or more obedient to my will. As I stood on the top step of that library ladder, I felt myself complete master of the situation.

"I clipped the threads, beginning at the top, and gradually revealed the beauties of Bradford's Juno.

"I can't conceive of such another glad, chirping cry of surprise as went up when the picture was but half in sight. But it was as nothing to the yell that arose, or the scene that followed, when the burlap cover dropped to the carpet. The artist had employed his consummate skill — he had surpassed himself — in the drawing and coloring of the figure, from the diademed hair to the gem-encrusted girdle — but there the figure ended — ended in something worse than deformity — for the nether limbs were clad, not in the drapery of a goddess, not in Grecian raiment at all, but in ordinary, everyday, masculine trousers — yes, even in 'pants' — and a conspicuous pair, of the very pattern I most affected!

"You know there's one thing, at least, that a married woman can never be told — a truth that's a jest everywhere except at home — and when a great artist tells it in a bold way, the telling of it stings sharper than a serpent's tooth.

"Excuse me. I was saying that from the picture I looked below. What faces! What a glare of eyes! And then what a bedlam! Everything swam before me and around me. It was some distance to the floor — perhaps that alone was sufficient to account for the fracture of the skull which kept me for many days in a hospital, hovering between life and death. Perhaps —

"However, as soon as I could crawl once more, I escaped from the nurses and the drowsy watchers, and went forth into the world and the night. And I've since followed obscure paths, as far as possible. Years have gone by, but memory endures, and the horror of it, and the dread of a similar inglorious pommelling.

"Do you understand now why I fall on my knees at the slightest noise, and look about me so timorously, on all sides at once?"

The Story That Cured His Wife.*

BY C. A. STEARNS.

HE Colonel's young wife had suffered a bereavement that left her in that state of melancholia which is the first stage of insanity. Nothing could rouse her from her dull, listless brooding. The surgeon of the post, of course, advised complete change of scene; but that was out of the question. Yet an immediate change of mental attitude was imperative. How could it be brought about?

While pondering deeply on this urgent problem, a chance word suggested to the Colonel a desperate expedient. Would it succeed? Might not the remedy prove more dangerous than the disease? Anything, he felt, would be better than that alarming lethargy.

Seating himself by his wife's couch, he with difficulty secured her wandering attention, and this is the story he told:

At the close of a hot, sultry afternoon, threatening a thunderstorm, a young lieutenant of engineers, in charge of a government surveying party, had gone on some distance in advance of his men to select a camping place for the night. Emerging from the forest, he entered a glade of considerable size, bounded on one side by a perpendicular ledge of rock, fifteen or twenty feet in height. Following the ledge, he came upon a decaying log cabin, built against the rock. Only a part of the thickly moss-grown roof remained, and above it projected the trunk of a large tree, built into the log wall of the shack at one of its angles nearest the ledge.

Startled by the loneliness of this wreck of a human shelter in the dense wilderness, the lieutenant pushed open the door, hung on wooden pins, which creaked dismally as it stiffly yielded. The earthen floor was littered with fragments of the broken roof and a

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few rusty cooking utensils. There were a mouldy table and bench, roughly hewn from tree trunks, and a three-legged stool. At the rear, which he had naturally expected to find of solid rock, the wooden wall was continued, and no light came through the wide chinks from which the clay had fallen out. From a common centre in the largest of these crannies charred streaks radiated, as though burnt into the solid wood by tongues of flame.

As the young engineer stood there gazing around the mouldering ruin, he wondered vaguely why he should care to waste a moment in such a desolate and uninviting spot. Yet he could not make up his mind to go. The daylight seemed to fade away, and was replaced by a strange, dull, yellowish glare. Several times he resolved to leave, but still he stayed. In a little while he felt a sensation of numbness in his feet. His eyelids grew heavy and drowsiness stole over him, bringing with it the terrible paralysis of nightmare. He felt that he could not move if he tried — and he dared not try.

Just then a distant shout came to his ears. It drew nearer and nearer, and the surveyors, crossing the glade in search of him, reached the open door, hanging on one of its pegs. With feet as heavy as lead he stepped over its threshold and almost with effusion greeted Sergeant Lawson, the hardest-headed man in the party, who came up first. The sergeant stared at him and into the gloomy hut, and lingered, looking curiously after the lieutenant, as with ever-lightening feet he led the men away from the cabin to a camping spot at some distance.

When camp was pitched, the lieutenant gave orders that the men should be waked and camp broken at half-past three in the morning, for a long march before breakfast in the cool of the day. As they sat about the fire after supper, enjoying a short smoke before turning in, the lieutenant could not keep his thoughts from the deserted cabin and his strange experience there. Pointing with his pipestem, he said to Lawson:

"Queer old shack over there."

The sergeant nodded and continued to look at him steadily with such an expression that the officer felt impelled to relate what had happened to him. Again Lawson nodded, knocked the ashes from his own pipe and said:

"I went in myself and had exactly the same sensations."

Each continued to look steadily into the other's face. They were men of action, not words. At length the lieutenant said:

"There's a moon for an hour before daylight, and an hour's sleep won't be missed—even if we can sleep. What do you say to an exploration of the ruined cabin before we march?"

It was so agreed.

When they stood again in the moonlight before the old hut, half buried in its mossy shroud, an unaccountable depression crept over them, like a miasmatic fog. Entering silently, they sat down on the bench, and looked about as their eyes became accustomed to the darkness. The moonlight, filtering through the broken roof, grew dimmer and dimmer as they gazed, and was gradually replaced by the faint, yellowish light they had seen in the afternoon, like that of the sun in an eclipse. The symptoms they had before experienced returned—the tingling sensation in the feet, creeping up through the body. Then the yellow light itself failed, and they were left in pitchy darkness. Both men fumbled for matches, but their fingers were numb and useless, and they felt the same dreadful numbness stealing over their senses.

At that moment they were startled into consciousness by an awful sight. At the point among the logs of the rear wall where the lieutenant had noticed the charred streaks, a straight, dagger-shaped dart of flame shot downward toward the floor and remained there quivering. Then a second flashed and wavered beside the first. They gave out a lurid, sulphurous light, like flames seen through a dense fog or smoke. Rapidly this smoky light, pouring through the crevices, shaped itself, until there appeared before them, nebulous but distinct, a towering form in the semblance of humanity. It seemed to glow with fiercest heat, yet, far from giving warmth, it only added to the deathly chill. As the lieutenant saw that fearful shape, solidifying out of the fiery vapor, he was assailed by an unreasoning, overwhelming, unconconquerable fear. He groped toward his companion, who sat rigid as marble, and laid a cold hand upon his arm. At his touch the trooper shrieked and dropped to the floor, leaving his officer alone with the Shape.

[As the Colonel's low, impressive tones put vivid life into this

thrilling verbal picture, he noted the light of concentrated attention in the eyes of his wife, followed by the welcome gleam of returning interest in human affairs.]

There the lieutenant sat, continued the narrator, his gaze held by a horrible fascination. He tried to speak, to stir, to move. He could not lift a finger. Not a muscle would answer his will. Even his eyes followed the quivering, swaying form of fire without his control.

The Shape grew more and more into the likeness of a human being of malignant type. Its color changed to a pale, greenish tint, like the phosphorescence of decaying wood. Faintly outlined in this dreadful medium could be traced a sunken, retreating brow, shadowed by a mat of hair, a hawklike nose, and long, wolfish teeth gleaming through a drooping moustache above a brutal jaw.

The eyes, compared with the face, seemed dark spots, yet they glistened with a ghastly light of their own. The engineer officer was conscious that those glowing orbs, bursting into intermittent flame like the embers of a dying fire, were fixed upon him with consuming hatred, and he vainly tried to evade their baleful glare.

His strength was slipping away with his enthralled volition, but he feared not bodily harm as much as he dreaded the assault and capture of his will, for he realized that some more potent psychic force than he possessed was striving to wrest from him his individuality. Physical death were welcome, compared with the unspeakable horror of the annihilation of his soul, as the result of its obsession by demoniac powers.

He struggled to retain his reason. With an effort of will that brought the dew of agony to his brow, he almost flung himself upright upon his feet, in an effort to escape. As he did so, the hideous Shape advanced, projected by the weird flames playing through the gaping chinks of the rear wall, and crept stealthily forward like an animal seeking its prey. The lieutenant could in fancy feel those horrible fangs piercing his very soul. As the dread Form was upon him, he instinctively threw up his arm, as if to ward off a physical blow, when a shock — a searing of the flesh as at the touch of liquid air — an etching jet of flame that

burned to the bone, ran through his wrist. Then he felt himself caught and dragged over the ground.

When he looked about with returning consciousness, he found himself surrounded by his men, some yards from the crumbling cabin, with Lawson stretched upon the grass, still unconscious. Missing the lieutenant and the sergeant at the hour set for breaking camp, the surveyors, attracted by a bright light in the ruined shack, had sought and found them there, insensible, and apparently overcome by mephitic fumes that filled the place. Both were as weak as though convalescing from a lingering fever, and the early morning march was abandoned.

By sunrise the leaders had so far recovered as to superintend the demolition of the cabin in which they had suffered such frightful fear. When the rotting log walls were thrown down and burnt, an extraordinary sight was revealed. As the blazing logs fell away from the face of the cliff, it was seen that the rear wall — in which there had been a movable section on pegs like the entrance door — masked a second chamber, a cavern in the rock. There was a rude fireplace in it, deep with ashes. Over it hung iron hooks and pots; crucibles and various instruments and utensils were scattered about. Beyond the fireplace and a rough workbench something was vaguely outlined in the dim light. Approached with a torch, it proved to be a human skeleton of unusual height, whose bleached bones were cracked and distorted. It was complete, except the feet, which were missing. The stumps of the ankle bones rested in a deep vat, sunk in the floor of the cave. One bony hand, split and blackened, grasped a wire that connected with the great growing tree trunk in the cabin wall.

It was with feelings of awe that the little party gazed at this strange sight, but the two leaders were glad to find themselves entirely free from the oppressive symptoms which had overpowered them when on the spot before. They looked at each other intently in silence, but afterwards exchanged confidences.

Was that the last page in the dread history of some student of unknown forces — some searcher into forbidden mysteries — trapped to his death amid the strange devices of his unholy occupation? It seemed so. Eagerly absorbed in some experiment while a great storm was raging without, his feet by an awful acci-

dent had slipped into the vat, containing no one knows what frightful mixture. To save himself, he had grasped the wire attached to the tree, which at that moment, by some strange chance or merited fatality, was riven by lightning, which followed the wire and passed through his body.

Had the sultry summer air, heavily charged with electricity, enabled the restless spirit of the sorcerer to utilize again that fateful circuit, impregnate the very ground with a resistless, benumbing power, and materialize itself electrically into the lambent, flaming figure they had seen? So they always believed, and the deep scar, an inch long, in the lieutenant's wrist, which he will carry to his grave, confirms him in that belief.

. . . . . .

The Colonel's wife started up as he concluded his story, and following her gaze, his eyes also rested on a livid scar on his own right hand, reaching from the base of the thumb to the wrist.

"O Richard!" she cried, rising and walking the room in her excitement, "I know at last the secret of that dreadful burn. It was you who suffered that awful experience. Oh, what if I had lost *you* too!"

Raising his eyes to hers, he saw with joy the wholesome brightness of sanity and health. As she sprang to her feet, the shackles of her morbid fancies dropped away, and she stood there glowing, once more the winsome and vivacious bride. The story had cured her.

The Golden Dryad.*

BY ALEXANDER BLACK.

LEN PIKE'S girl was going after the cows. She whistled as she walked, in defiance of the just rights of the bobolink and the cat-bird, and the low sun struck a spark on the wet of her lips. Up from Ontario came a bantering breeze that found the loose strands in the girl's hair, and that flipped them irreverently into arabesques of bronze.

When you reach the top of the rise back of Len Pike's house, you meet a stretch of path that creeps into the clump of hemlocks planted by Len's wife's father, and spared the ax in honor of that good old gentleman's memory. Just beyond is a crippled fence, a puddle, a long field running down to the marsh and the woods. At this hour the cows were due at the fence, if they had not again violated the sanctity of the neighboring and acutely unfriendly farm.

Connie Pike fluttered down the path leading to the hemlocks, her lips still in the tension of the drawing-string muscle, her gray eyes wandering without purpose, her hard brown hands swinging their counterpoint to the tune of her step, when out of the hemlocks came an apparition so amazing and inexplicable that the girl's shoes smote together, one hand faltered to her bosom, her eyes fixed in a startled stare, and the song she had been whistling faded with the color of her lips.

In the frame of hemlock boughs stood a young man wearing an acrobat's fleshings, with spangled purple trunks. His black hair was dishevelled and his beardless face was flushed as if from lively exertion. A touch of particular grotesqueness was imparted to his appearance by the stain of mud that covered his tights to the knees.

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For a moment the apparition seemed as startled as the girl. Then it spoke:

"I beg your pardon — where can I get some help? I've just come down in a balloon, and I want to get the thing out of the swamp here and packed before dark."

Involuntarily the girl's eyes lifted to the tree tops as if to look for the balloon; then the words "swamp" and "help" came back to her, and she succeeded in saying, "Father is over there at the barn."

"I wish you would show me the way," he said, moving toward her.

She turned without speaking, and he followed her up the path. She could hear him panting behind her, yet the image left with her was so unreal that she would have felt certain, had she looked again, of finding that her eyes had deceived her.

"I had a mighty close call," came the voice over her shoulder. "How far do you call it to the lake?"

"Less than a mile."

"It didn't look as wide as a chicken lot. And that bog! — Scott! what a hole! Nearly cracked my neck in it. What is the nearest village?"

"Westerling is a little nearer than Hollyville, I think."

The last of the sun was crimsoning her neck as she moved before him, her broad hips rocking, her skirt clinging and flowing in the breeze.

At the top of the path they came in sight of the barn and of Pike carrying a buck-saw. Then she turned and looked at him again while he spoke to her father, urging Pike to come at once with his man.

"Have yer got the thing tied?" asked Pike when he had come out of the stupor of his astonishment.

"Oh, the thing's empty now," replied the balloonist. "I dumped it. You'll come right along, won't you?"

"I'll 'tend to the milkin'," said Connie.

When Pike and his man started off through the dusk with the balloonist, Connie noticed for the first time that the young man limped heavily, and she winced at every step he took until he melted into the dark green beyond the pasture.

Connie was just finishing the milking when she heard them coming back, and peering over the cow-yard fence, she saw the fleshings of the balloonist against the shadow of the currant bushes, and caught the twinkle of the spangles in the figure's halting transit to the porch. The milk pans that night held three quarts less than usual.

"I guess yer just about in time fer supper," Pike was saying when the girl came up to the kitchen door with her two pails.

The newcomer was standing with his back to the stove, over which Connie's mother was fussing with a pan of cakes. Presently the young man sat down in a self-possessed way in a little black chair near by, twisting his mouth as he did so. "To tell you the truth," he said, investigating his right leg with his hand, "I'm afraid I'll have to give up getting back to Hawksville to-night. Can I engage a room with you here?"

"Wall, I dunno about engagin'," returned Pike, "but there's a bed you're welcome to."

Mrs. Pike lifted her sharp face. "Leonard, if the young man wants to engage a room I hope you won't make him unwelcome."

"Not a bit!" retorted Pike. "I guess he knows he's welcome here. Y' give that leg quite a twist, I guess."

"Rather!" ejaculated the balloonist, slowly extricating his foot from the shoe, and tentatively working the tendon Achilles. "I shouldn't like to try the bar with that now."

"I kin lend yer a pair of my slippers," said Pike.

"I wish you would. Hello! Do you know, I forgot where I put that money!" The young man lifted two five-dollar bills out of his discarded shoe. "You see, I jumped into the sky with a good financial footing!"

"Lord!" laughed Pike. "What was yer goin' to do with money up in the air?"

"Well, Leonard," expostulated Mrs. Pike, "I guess he expected to come down somewhere, didn't he?"

"Ho, ho!" roared Pike, "that's so!"

"Perhaps you'll want to change your things," suggested Mrs. Pike, glancing at the bundle which had been slung to the ring of the balloon. "Supper'll be ready in just a minute. Sha'n't I show you the room? And, Leonard, I wish you'd get that lini-

ment." Mrs. Pike led the way into a chamber on the south side of the house, the balloonist hobbled slowly after her, and Pike brought up the rear with a pair of slippers in one hand and the liniment in the other. Connie watched the procession from the little dining-room table, wincing again at every step of the injured foot.

When the balloonist shuffled out in Pike's slippers, and wearing his normal clothes, his quick, dark eyes sought the girl, who in the interval of his transformation had slipped into a gay light gown. Mrs. Pike, too, acknowledged the presence of company in a brown merino affair with lace at the wrists, and Pike was suffering in a collar. The best lamp glowed in the midst of four kinds of cake, three kinds of preserves, a plate of hot biscuits and a jar of pickles.

Despite the pain in his leg the balloonist was hungry. He would have given the wealth of his right shoe for a steak — a large steak. As it was, he ate three plates of preserves, much hot biscuit, three kinds of cake, and drank tea until the hostess was obliged to signal to Pike that he could not expect his usual second cup.

"What beats me," said Pike, "is how you hung on to the thing. Didn't you have nothing but that there stick?"

"That's all," replied the balloonist. "You take hold of that trapeze bar with one hand, and when the balloon swings into the wind you yell to let go; then up you sail and the band plays 'Nearer, my God, to Thee.'"

Mrs. Pike studied the balloonist obliquely. He was eating the cranberries, and resenting the dimensions of the best lamp, which prevented him from seeing Connie very well.

"But, Mr. ——"

"Thadrick," volunteered the balloonist — "I ought to have told you — Fenton Thadrick is my name."

"I was going to say," pursued Mrs. Pike, "that you couldn't have held on with one hand for fourteen miles."

"Well, no," admitted Thadrick, "I couldn't. After I got up a couple of hundred feet I skinned the cat and hung by my toes just to hear them yell."

Connie was staring through the lamp, her lips parted, her hands in her lap.

"Je-rusalem!" Pike suspended the progress of his chocolate cake. "Didn't that make you nervous?"

"If you want to know what made me nervous I'll tell you a fact. You see, this trip I wanted to make it pretty high. It was a great day, and I said to myself, now is your time to let out a little. I was tired of just getting out of sight of the crowd and coming down again. So I unhitched the sand after awhile and dropped nearly all of it, and the ten thousand fell away until they looked like ants, and the woods got blue and the horizon came up at me like the rim of a saucer. Of course, I was sitting on the bar now, and feeling mighty comfortable. When I looked at the barometer after a while — I don't know that you understand what a barometer is: a sort of little clock with a vacuum drum to tell you how high you are — anyway, the first time I looked at that barometer it said twenty-one hundred feet. When I looked again it was fifty-seven hundred. Scott! It was a wonderful day! You have no idea of the sensation of being in a balloon — not the slightest sense of motion, you know. The wind might blow a hurricane and you wouldn't know it, for the balloon is going with it. You can only see the ground sliding under you. Well, by and by I found myself pumping a little for breath, and I began to see — if I had been an old hand I would have seen it sooner — that the lake was coming toward me. Now, I wasn't hankering to go after Andrée just then. When I started up the wind was from the northwest. As near as I could make out now I was in a new current from the southeast. At that I grabbed the barometer, and it was still fifty-seven hundred! Something was wrong. I struck the thing against the ring and it jumped to nineteen thousand feet! I was nearly four miles high!"

"Lord!" gasped Pike.

"And when I reached for the valve cord I could hardly lift my hand. It weighed a hundred, and my ears began to scream and my eyes to feel queer. I wished I hadn't been so fresh with that sand. When I got the valve open I hadn't more than a minute to spare. I might have lived longer than that, but in a mighty little while I shouldn't have been able to reach the cord; I should have keeled off that bar — and it was a long drop!"

Connie drew a quick breath.

"I held on to that rope, for the lake began to seem almost under me. It *was* under me before I got through. I never let go. I knew I had to depend on a quick drop and the kindness of the lower current. There was no picking the spot. She came down at a parachute gait — she wouldn't have come any quicker if she had been empty, and I didn't know until the last minute — until the last half minute — that I was going to dodge the lake. I couldn't have kept it away from me if it hadn't been for the lower current. When I lit in that swampy piece I went clean through the crust of that old oak stump, the balloon settling over me. She was just like a low mushroom then, and I didn't have any trouble tipping her over to dump all the gas that was left."

"It's a mercy," cried Mrs. Pike, her face white, "that you didn't break all your bones!"

"Or get drowned in the lake," said Pike.

"Weren't you *very* grateful to get down?" asked Connie, faintly.

"Yes, I was grateful," admitted Thadrick, moving his chair so that he could see around the lamp, "though I suppose I really wasn't in great danger. Half a mile is a good margin. If that barometer hadn't been crazy I wouldn't have gone so high."

"I shouldn't think you ever would want to go up again," added Connie.

Thadrick laughed. "I'm afraid I'm not cured yet. I dare say," he added, "the report is out that I have gone into the lake."

"Won't they worry about you?" ventured Connie.

"Oh, Simms 'll be a little anxious. He'll be looking for me toward Dubberly Junction somewhere. What'll tickle him is that the "Victory" isn't ripped a stitch. She's his pet. Heavens! How that man did coddle that silk. I suspect he used to kiss it when I wasn't looking!"

They watched Thadrick hobble off to his sleeping quarters. It was a little birdcage of a room — *her* room evidently; Thadrick sitting on the edge of the bed guessed this at a first glance. He turned and looked at the pillow and the striped coverlet. But he did not dream of her. His dream related to a gigantic vulture that swooped and caught him by the right foot while he sat on the trapeze of the "Victory."

He understood the dream in the morning when he found that he could not move his leg without great pain. He was compelled to get Pike's hired man to ride over to Westerling and send a telegram to Simms. He permitted Mrs. Pike to fetch him some breakfast and to rub his ankle with the liniment. The rubbing worked such magic that he got up in an hour and made his way to the side porch, where Connie was sewing on a navy-blue dress.

"All this trouble for a common sprain," he said.

"You should be glad it isn't worse."

"I suppose I'm not so grateful as I ought to be."

"Have you ever read 'Sir Lionel's Secret'?" asked Connie.

"I don't believe I have," replied Thadrick.

"What made me ask," continued Connie, "is that the hero in that story is hurt in the woods while coming to see Sir Lionel on business, and they brought him to the manor house."

"Well, I didn't have any business *here*," Thadrick said.

They both laughed. "You know what I mean," said Connie. "It made me think of the hero to see you coming just now."

"Thanks. The hero *ought* to have a right to come out, hadn't he? Then, of course, you are the heroine; but in all the stories I ever read the hero always was laid up at the heroine's house for a long time, and *please*, Miss Heroine, I can't stay here an hour longer than I must, because I have three ascensions next week."

Connie gave him a peculiar look. "I wish you didn't have to go up any more."

"Why?" demanded Thadrick with real perplexity.

"Because it's so dangerous."

"And why should you care?"

"I don't know why I care."

"As for that," Thadrick went on, "I suppose you have a right to a certain fellow-feeling for other folks who might have balloonists dropping around and scaring them when they are going after the cows."

"I thought you were a spirit."

"I just escaped that."

"Why do you go up in balloons?"

Thadrick looked across the valley. "I don't know. Maybe I like it a little."

"What is there to like about it?" challenged Connie.

"To begin with, it's dangerous. That makes it interesting."

"Do you like danger?" Connie asked, with a puzzled look.

"Yes," admitted Thadrick. "That is, I used to. Perhaps I am getting over that. You see," he continued, "they gave me up, and I heard it around about that I had only about eighteen months or so to live. Then I did all sorts of devilish things. Yes, I was pretty wild. I wished something *would* happen. After awhile I tried an Adirondack farm and they stopped giving me up. Then I fell in with a man who made and sent up balloons at county fairs. I thought I would like to try that sort of thing, and I slung a trapeze from the peak of the barn and practised there half a summer. I got to be as strong as a baggage agent. Simms sent me up a few times in a captive balloon; then he let me try the 'Nancy,' and I wanted more. Did you ever see an ascension?"

"No," replied Connie.

"I tell you," said Thadrick, turning to her, "you ought to see me take up the 'Golden Dryad'!"

"The 'Golden Dryad'!" Connie repeated the name. "It sounds like a fairy story."

"It's one of Mrs. Simms's notions. "She is very sentimental and has some funny titles for the balloons. The 'Golden Dryad' is a big one. I'm going to take up a bridal couple in her at the Hantyville fair. Couldn't you come over somehow? There'll be a great time there. They say that the town storekeepers are giving four hundred dollars' worth of stuff to the couple who are going up."

"I wish I could," murmured Connie.

That afternoon Thadrick asked Mrs. Pike if she would mind his staying until the next morning. "I tell you, Mrs. Pike," he said, "I'm getting sensible in my old age, and I know that if I monkey with this foot to-day, it will bother me longer than I want it to."

"Mercy! Mr. Thadrick!" exclaimed Mrs. Pike, "you're welcome to stay as long as you want to." Mrs. Pike was rather pleased with Thadrick. Pike had informed her that there was a good deal of money in ballooning.

In the evening Thadrick told them many of his adventures. Mrs. Pike set out some new cider and chocolate cake, and Connie

was induced to play several pieces on the organ, to one of which Thadrick sang, in a clear, strong tenor.

"Simms wouldn't have a bit of sympathy for me," Thadrick said, "if he knew what a riot I was having."

In the morning he went away in Pike's "democrat," the "Victory" folded up behind the seat. It was just a week to the day when he came back. "I had to cross over from Remly," he said to Mrs. Pike, "and it seemed a pity not to come out and tell you how completely you had cured me."

Connie's eyes fluttered when she saw him. "And is your foot all better?" she asked him.

"Thanks to Mrs. Dr. Pike, it is," declared Thadrick. "I can walk like a head waiter."

When Pike came in and they were all at dinner, Thadrick again brought up the subject of the Hantyville Fair. "I dunno, Therza," said Pike to his wife, "why shouldn't you and Connie go over and see Myra and take in the fair?"

Mrs. Pike didn't see how they could, unless they could get some clothes ready. "Bother the clothes!" laughed Pike. "Myra's been wantin' Connie to come over for the last six months."

In the afternoon Connie again was sewing on the navy-blue dress. "I'll wear this if we go," she said to Thadrick.

"Just the thing," he exclaimed, looking at her eyelashes. In a moment he said very quietly: "I wanted to see you again."

"Did you?" She smiled a queer little smile without looking up.

"To tell you the truth," pursued Thadrick, "I found that I *had* to see you again. That was funny, wasn't it?"

"I don't know that it was," Connie said, slowly. "I could have thought that myself, if it had been any use."

They were on the little porch. It was a warm October day. The country was drowsing.

Thadrick caught one of her hands from the sewing. "Is that so?" he exclaimed. "Did you really care whether I came back?"

"Of course I did."

"I'm going to tell you," cried Thadrick, "without waiting

another minute that I like you better than any other girl I have ever seen — that isn't putting it strong enough either." He looked down at her hand and held it between both of his. "I guess I'm in love with you, Connie."

She turned her face away. When he looked up there was a little tremor in her lips. "I think," she said, "you'd better wait until you know me better."

"I'm willing to know you better, but I'm not willing to wait — if you mean to put off liking you so much. Suppose," Thadrick said, "suppose you let me go on liking you in the meantime?"

"I was goin' to ask you, Mr. Thadrick," called Mrs. Pike from the doorway, "what time of day your balloon goes up?"

"Well, they advertise it for four, Mrs. Pike, but that means five, or later. The last train south goes at five-fifteen, and they want to make the crowd miss it so as to keep them in town to blow in money during the evening."

They wanted him to stay to supper, but he had to go away at four. "Mind you!" he shouted with his good-by, "I'll hold the 'Golden Dryad' till you come!"

. . . . . .

There was a crush at the Hantyville Fair. It was the third day. The trotting stopped at three o'clock in anticipation of the balloon, which was to go up from a point behind the grand stand. By this hour the vast, restless crowd swayed and scuffled for a glimpse of the big yellow bag that had begun to lift itself from the ground.

A little, excitable man was superintending the work at the gas generators. The crowd was breaking down the ropes, and the little man, who was Simms, the balloon maker, shook his fat fist at the people and told them if they didn't keep back he would cut a hole in the balloon, and they could go home and curse themselves for fools.

Up in the corner of the grand stand stood Thadrick, covertly holding Connie's hand. "I came as quick as I could," she said. "Mamma didn't feel that she could come, and papa was bound I should, and so I drove over to the train with the Lanes. As Aunt Myra never goes out now, she didn't want me to leave her right away."

"It's all right," said Thadrick. "Just look at Simms, will you! He'll burst a blood-vessel. Guess I'll have to go down and lend a hand." After a time he came back to her through the crowd. The balloon was filling and she could now read the name in white letters: "Golden Dryad."

"Have you seen the wedding presents?" asked Thadrick; and he took her away across the grounds to show her the wonderful bounty of the town tradesmen. "Don't forget," he said, as they walked back, "that I'm going to wave you a good-by. When I kiss my hand — that's *you!*"

The plan was to hold the balloon captive while the basket, with the bride, bridegroom and minister, rose to a height from which the multitude could witness the marriage. Then it was to be drawn down, the minister was to step out, the balloonist was to step in, and the anchoring cable was to be loosened.

When Connie saw the balloon, she exclaimed to Thadrick: "Why, there is a nice place to stand in, isn't there?"

Thadrick gave his hearty laugh. "You didn't expect the bridal couple and me to go up sitting on a trapeze, did you?" Thadrick told her just where to stand, pressed her hand again, and left her.

At last the balloon was swaying impatiently in leash of the big, weighted netting. It was nearly five o'clock and the crowd chafed and clamored, until it was hard to hear the band. Of a sudden, then, a commotion, beginning in the little office of the fair committee near the gate, spread over the crowd like a puff of wind in a field of wheat.

"She's afraid to go up!"

"The man's run away!"

"The minister says he won't trust the rope!"

"It's a bunco game! An advertisin' dodge!"

"They haven't any bridal couple!"

A big, flushed farmer caught one of the committeemen roughly by the coat. "What does this mean, anyway?"

"It's straight. The couple have had a spat. She won't marry him!"

The demeanor of the crowd became angry, then abusive. Simms was livid. The band stopped playing. A fence near the balloon

went down with a crash. Connie, standing aloof in the upper corner of the grand stand, saw Thadrick in the centre of a group of excited men. Three of the men wore the badge of the committee. Then she saw Thadrick fighting his way to her.

"It's Royal Daring. He's trying to get away!"

"No, I'm not!" shouted Thadrick. "I'm going after the bride!"

The crowd parted for him, and he finally came to Connie, reaching hard for breath. "Connie," he gasped at her, "will you marry me — here — now, in the balloon? Don't say no! You know I'm crazy in love with you, and I'll take good care of you, and — "

She looked past him, at the balloon, at the plain, black with people, and laughed an odd, frightened little laugh.

"You will, won't you, Connie? We'll be down before dark, and then we can go and ask forgiveness." He laughed excitedly. "And think, Connie, all those presents are ours if we go! That would be a joke, wouldn't it? Say yes, Connie!"

"Oh, I couldn't!" she said, shaking her head with unnecessary vigor, as if to fortify herself with the violence of the gesture.

"Connie," he caught both her arms, "don't say that! Of course you can go. It's rough for me to propose to you right before everybody — but I almost proposed to you the other day, and you didn't throw me over, Connie. Say yes, Connie. The crowd's crazy, and they won't have me alone. Hanging by the toes won't go to-day — "

She turned her face to him. "I'll do it," she answered, firmly; "I'll do it this way; if you will promise never to go up in a balloon any more."

"That this is to be the very last?" asked Thadrick.

"The very last."

"But, Connie — "

"That's the bargain," she said, without flinching.

The crowd saw him catch her by the arm, and a path broke for them, the air filling with a new tumult, in the midst of which the band could be heard screaming the wedding march.

"Where's the parson?"

He was standing there, pale, but smiling, near the balloon. The crowd laughed and cheered and scuffled again when they

were climbing into the car, and then when the sand weights were taken off the netting, and the man spent out the cable for twenty feet or more, and the "Golden Dryad" rose and swayed high and clear, there was a sudden silence.

No one could hear the minister, but every one could see him, and could see Thadrick, his cap off, one hand to the rim of the basket, the other clasping Connie's trembling fingers. Every one could see the minister steadying himself and reading from a little book. Every one saw Thadrick stoop and kiss the girl. Every one did not know that it was for the first time.

"You, too, dominie!" called a hundred voices. And the minister, losing his book, did as he was bid.

Now for a tug on the rope until the dominie could get out, until Simms could put in two bags of sand in his place, until a score of men could grasp the car, which wrestled with them like a live thing. The breeze was freshening.

Thadrick unfastened the cable. "Now," said Thadrick to the men, "when I say 'let go!' you must all let go at once — do you understand — all at once!"

Twice the balloon swayed like an inverted pendulum. As it returned to windward a third time, Thadrick's voice rang out:

"Let go!"

The basket gave a lurch, the wind seemed suddenly to stop, everything seemed to stop in an awful, convulsive hush, the black crowd fell away below them, and then they were enveloped by a great thrilling roar.

"You are not afraid, are you?" shouted Thadrick, in the girl's white face. He was holding her firmly with his left arm, though the balloon no longer swayed.

She shook her head, her eyes on his. He could feel the thumping of her heart. The roar seemed to grow in volume for a few seconds. There were fifteen thousand throats, and struggling through the din came the frantic squealings of the band.

The noise seemed so near and the car so still that Connie dropped her eyes incredulously, and when she saw, far below them, the vast crowd like a black spot on the grotesque checkerboard of the fields, she shrank involuntarily toward Thadrick, who reassured her with his arm.

Then his arm released her.

"God almighty!"

The sight of his face gave her the first moment of real fear. Her lips moved to question him, but her eyes answered her when they followed his. The horizon had risen like the rim of a saucer, and obscuring the western line of the rim, hung a long, sullen swirl of cloud.

"I might have known!" muttered Thadrick, diving into the bottom of the basket and fetching up one of the bags, from which he let loose a long snake of yellow sand. He sent another leaping and writhing after it, and the serpents grew big and vague, like spectres, and then vanished.

"It 's all right, Connie!" he cried to her. "We 'll get above it!" His voice sounded strangely in the awful silence.

"Above it?"

"The storm," he answered. "I didn't see it. There was such a devil of a hubbub — and I was being married!"

"Do you mean," she asked, quietly taking hold of his arm, "that we shouldn't have come up?"

He was going to lie to her, but for the first time the mouth of the balloon flapped and whispered. "Yes," he said, looking straight at her, "that is what I mean." He caught her to him. "But you will be real brave, won't you — and not mind a little excitement?"

The basket gave a slight shiver. "No," she answered, her arms about his neck; "I won't mind now, because I will die, too."

Then he unbound her arms and bade her stand quietly, and he twice took up a third sand-bag and put it down again, alternately searching the scowling face of the storm and the placid countenance of the barometer. Connie could see nothing but him. The drab earth beneath, the vast blue above, the flecks of vapor about them, the occasional frown in the silk of the balloon as it slowly revolved in the golden light, were minor appearances. His face was her barometer. It never occurred to her to wonder whether he really was a hero. She knew he couldn't be a coward.

When he did not speak she understood that he was worried. She wondered whether he only was afraid that the "Golden Dryad" would get torn. Occasionally he looked at her. Once he

caught her again. "God!" he cried, "it wouldn't do now. We are in a storm, Connie girl. I can't spare any more sand, and it has caught us. If I was alone I wouldn't care, but — I never had my bride with me before!"

Then he began to be cheerful. "Now, Mrs. Thadrick" — and she laughed at the name — "you may have to do some queer stunts before you get on solid earth again. And you must obey me now, whether you ever are going to obey me afterwards or not."

"I'll obey you," said Mrs. Thadrick.

If she had shown any fear he might sooner have realized the need for hiding his anxiety. Her radiant faith in him made her seem more worth while than anything else life had ever offered.

"And let me tell you, Mrs. Thadrick," he said, with her face between his cold hands, "that your husband will spend the rest of his life trying to deserve you."

"You won't have to try so hard, will you?" she laughed at his eyes.

He did not answer. The crimson of the sun had faded from the "Golden Dryad." Strange mists were about them. The mouth of the balloon whispered again, and once or twice Connie caught the smell of gas.

"It's so quiet," she said, "I can't think there is any storm."

But almost as she spoke a drop of spray struck her face, and from a bank of mist to which her gaze had travelled a moment before, fell a great gray feather of rain that trailed to the drab earth below them. The balloon glittered as with sweat, rain trickled from the neck and netting, and, turning from the barometer, Thadrick loosened another wriggling snake of sand into the vapors below them. The balloon quivered, the vapors seemed to fall, and the smell of gas came with the trickling water, but Thadrick's face was drawn.

For the second time Connie saw him examine the anchor, of which one claw clung to the rim of the basket. A long loop fell from the anchor, and, looking down, Connie could see the road lines, field markings and barn roofs floating into the shadow of the storm.

"If there's any way I can help," suggested Connie, "you must let me. I am very strong."

"Oh, I'll call on you, little aeronaut!" he cried, shifting the claw of the anchor. "See! I'm going to begin now!" And he lifted the last bag of sand and placed her hands upon it, so that it might be supported by the edge of the basket. "When I say the word, you are to dump it quick."

"I will!" she murmured, her face glowing.

He kissed her again. "You must not look down," he commanded, and she turned her wide gray eyes to the storm.

He himself studied the flying fields below. "A mile a minute!" he muttered under his breath, then shut his teeth, and examined again the anchor rope fastening in the concentrating ring over his head. There was mockery in the rope, for to try the land was death. To rise, with cooled gas, in the wetted balloon, in a wind that smote downward like the paw of an angry beast, might soon be impossible. He deliberately took the bag of sand from the girl and released half of the contents. The loss of the precious sand wrenched from the barometer the grudging respite of two hundred feet.

"Good God!" cried Thadrick, his face away from Connie.

In their path was a wooded hill. Immediately beyond this was a narrow river, then a long stretch of field, running to the foot of another, lower hill.

"Just beyond the river," thought Thadrick, "unless we clear the first hill with a good margin." The turn of the balloon made him hope for a moment that the main current of the storm was passing them. His heart leaped to see that the earth sped less rapidly. But the gas was not lifting. Pressure had caused heavy loss at the mouth and rain still druled from the flapping lips.

The hill came nearer, rising and darkening. "Steady, Connie girl!" whispered Thadrick, when the hill seemed still a mile away. "We may get a slap from the trees." Then he threw out the last sand, peered at the hill, and, squatting for a moment in the basket, threw out his shoes. "Every little helps!" He laughed tremulously at the girl.

In an instant she had wrenched off her own low shoes and flung them out. "No!" he exclaimed. "Those little things—"

Before he could stop her a little blue jacket and crimson feathered hat were careering downward like two strange birds.

He had stretched out one hand to command her. The other was on the anchor. The hill rushed at them. Thadrick knew that in the quieter air the balloon would rise with the slope of the ground. How much would it rise in this wind? He drew in the loop of the anchor rope hand over hand. A loud, sad murmur rose out of the woods.

"Down!" yelled Thadrick, and forcing the girl into the shelter of the basket, he caught up his forgotten coat and wrapped it about her head.

A harsh shock almost inverted the basket. "Thank God!" cried Thadrick. They had only brushed the top of the hill.

"No!" cried Connie, fetching her face out of the coat. "I won't die down here!" And she caught him by the neck and pushed her cold lips into his face.

"Let me alone!" commanded Thadrick, forcing her from him, and clutching hard at the valve cord he cast the anchor, tines down, as if into the river. The thing struck, as he intended, beyond the far bank, and as the balloon jumped in its freedom from the weight of the iron, he caught the girl with his free arm. There was a frightful lurch of the basket, and Thadrick saw the iron leap out of the field and clutch again at the corn furrows a hundred feet beyond. When it leaped again one of the tines was gone and the three others had straightened.

Thadrick had held hard on the valve cord and tried to force the girl down into shelter. She fell on her knees, clasping his.

Twice the basket slapped the field. Then it tore through a fence. The balloon, half empty, squirmed and quivered, the wind lifting its folds into the netting, bellying it like a sail.

Thadrick, enraged at his helplessness and tortured by a fear that, after all, death might tear from him the face here beside him, had a confused consciousness that they were nearing a farmhouse, and that there was a barn and low sheds. He heard the shouts of men, a harsh jarring and clatter as if the basket had torn through a stone wall, the anchor rope snapped and the huge, swaying shadow of the balloon rose a little. The blur was veined by the lines of the netting. He seemed to see the eaves of a barn as he crouched to guard the girl's head, and then came a shock.

. . . . . .

They were carrying her toward the house. That was the first thing he saw. "I can walk," he said to the man who was with him. He wiped the blood out of his eyes again and did walk a staggering line.

"Is she dead?" he asked the woman.

"I hope not," she answered.

They had placed her on a little couch in a room opening from the veranda. She was breathing. "The doctor!" cried Thadrick, without taking his eyes from her face.

"They have gone for him," the woman said.

Thadrick was on his knees. They could not get him away. So the woman fetched some water and bathed his head and face while he knelt there.

"It's strange," muttered the woman. "She doesn't seem to be hurt anywhere." But Thadrick looked at the awful whiteness of her face and his heart burned in him.

When at last the wheels crunched in the yard and the doctor came, Thadrick rushed at him, his face twisting. "Doctor — "

The doctor lifted his hand and walked straight over to the girl. He was an old man, with short white hair and an inscrutable face. When he turned away he did not look at Thadrick. "Is there anything else I can do?" whispered the woman.

Thadrick dropped his face in his hands. "God knows!" he sobbed, "she was too good for me!"

They carried her into the bedroom. When the doctor came out, Thadrick clutched him. "Is there any chance at all?"

"I'm going to stay here until I find out." He made Thadrick submit to the dressing of the wounds in his head and forced him to lie down on the couch where they first had placed the girl.

At nine o'clock the doctor came over to Thadrick, who sprang up for the hundredth time at the sound of his step. "I'll be back in a couple of hours," he said.

Thadrick could not speak for joy.

"Yes," said the old man, reading his appeal, "she is coming around."

The Mist in the Valley.*

BY VIRGINIA M. CORNELL.

THERE are stretches along what is known on the map as Raccoon, or Sand Mountain, where the bluff of solid rock extends down, straight and sheer, to the level of the valley. From the edge of these bluffs one looks across a space of some ten or twenty miles to the side of Lookout, a parallel plateau which extends southward for many miles from Point Lookout, the site of the famous "Battle above the Clouds." This mountain rises somewhat higher than its neighbor across the valley, shutting in the range of vision, yet giving at times as it melts away into blueness an idea of immeasurable distance. There is that in this view which, at certain seasons of the year, and under certain atmospheric conditions, approaches the grandeur of more pretentious scenery.

I do not know that Rose Lea White, who came to one of these bluffs the bride of a slouching-gaited young mountaineer, ever looked upon it as being especially scenic, but she spent a good deal of time, when her husband was in the field, the first spring and summer of her marriage, sitting under the projecting limb of a big flowering ash, which grew in a fissure of the rock, and looking with unchanging face across the valley. One may never know what she thought. There are astronomers who, sweeping the nightly heavens with a lens of the most powerful magnitude, find their view of space still bounded; and there are those, again, to whose vision spaces which may be spanned by the common outlooks of daily life are quite as illimitable. So there is no rule by which, if Rose Lea had thoughts, one might have measured them. She had been born and raised back in the middle of the mountain and until her marriage to young Joe White brought her to the edge of it had scarcely thought that it had an edge, life having

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its beginnings and endings in her primitive household tasks on the one hand and the corn rows and truck patches on the other. But marriage is a wonderful thing, even to a Sand Mountain girl, and the vision of Rose Lea, sitting under the flowering ash on the bluff, may have gone, or longed to go, farther than one might suppose.

At any rate, when a while afterwards her baby, little Joe, began to look about upon the world he had come to, his eyes had a wondering, yearning look in them, and his first voyage of discovery, when he could creep, was to the edge of the bluff, which was only a few yards from the east door where Rose Lea always looked for the sunrise. There his mother found him one afternoon, when the shadows were long upon Lookout and the top of the mountain so blue that it was impossible to tell which was mountain and which was sky. And to that spot he persisted in creeping, until Joe, the father, one day fenced in the dooryard with pickets, which was a wise precaution, and added much to the safety of the other children, who followed little Joe in rapid succession, as children are accustomed to do upon the top of Raccoon, or Sand Mountain. And so for Rose Lea was an end of sitting under the flowering ash and looking across the valley.

But not for Joe, who grew big enough to let himself out of the gate after a while. He was a quiet boy, not given greatly to enjoying the sports of his brothers and sisters, and working at his little daily tasks in an absent, dreamy way, which tried the patience of Rose Lea, though, like most mothers, her heart held its own special tenderness for her first-born. When he was old enough to "tote a hoe" his father found that frequent applications of the "hick'ry" seemed necessary to keep him going. It was not that he was unwilling, but he was apt to forget what he had been sent to the field for, and you could often easily count ten from the time when he lifted his hoe into the air until he brought it down again. And in the meantime, as Joe, the father, truthfully remarked, the crab grass "kep' right on a growin'."

When he was high enough to hold the plow handles it was still the same. He sometimes forgot to "cluck" to his nag from one end of the row to the other, and the nag, not overfed nor overfond of going, used occasionally to take advantage of her master's lax-

ness in this respect by indulging in a long rest now and then when the sun was hot and the rows far stretching. And many times Joe was none the wiser.

For several summers he travelled up and down the long corn rows, and how far else he went no one knew. He always sat for his noontime rest out on the edge of the bluff, sometimes whittling a stick, but more often idle, with his arms around his knees, as Rose Lea used to sit a long time before. Sometimes, too, when he could keep awake after his day's work, he watched the full moon come up over Lookout, and one night he received a surprise and a revelation. It had been raining, a warm, slow, foggy rain, but at sundown it had suddenly cleared, and the mist which had hung all day over the mountain dropped down into the valley. And as Joe went to the edge of the bluff, he saw it lying there in the moonlight, dense and deeply moving, like a great body of water. To his startled gaze it seemed to rise and billow up to his very feet, and he stretched forth his arms with sudden longing.

"The sea!" he cried, wildly. "The sea! the sea!" and then stood silent, gazing. For Joe had found at last what he had so long sought for up and down the corn rows, and a fierce yearning was upon him for what lay far beyond the rim of Lookout. The world-old power of oceans had called to him out of the mist in the valley, and — "he would tell them all in the morning that he was going away."

But he did not go away. For Joe, the father, saw that one morning's sunrise, and he saw no more. He was found lying in the woods with his gun beside him and whether he had shot himself accidently, or whether some one else had done the shooting, no one knew. But, at any rate, he was dead, and to Joe, the son, Rose Lea looked for the making of the scanty crop in summer, and the hauling of the crossties and stave bolts which bought the family's coffee and brogans in winter.

So he walked for another summer up and down the corn rows, and another and another. And his nag still stopped sometimes while he thought of that moment on the bluff and its vision. Then he went on again.

At the end of the third summer he began to walk home from meeting with a girl who had a fresh face, with wind-blown hair

around it, and a slim waist. He was only twenty then, and he had never thought of girls until he saw this one; and suddenly, as he looked at her, something of the same feeling came upon him which he had had when he saw the sea of mist stretching between the mountains. And, as Annie was more obtainable than the sea, his desire for her became reality, and so, for many years, the end of Joe's looking across the valley also.

But when he was an old man his dreams came back to him. Annie and Rose Lea were both sleeping beside his father, and his brothers and sisters were dead and scattered. His own children were scattered too, some of them sleeping along with Annie, and only one widowed daughter, whose fifteen-year-old son followed a sturdy mule between the corn rows, lived with him at the old place on the bluff. He spent most of his mornings out on the porch at the east of the house where Rose Lea used to watch the sunrise, his pipe in his mouth and his old gaze going out across the valley. He did not often venture near the bluff's edge, for his steps were tottering and he was afraid, but there were times when there were many things which he remembered; yet he never thought of blaming Rose Lea nor Annie for the unfulfilment of his dreams, and as they were sleeping toward the sunset, he usually moved his chair to the west porch in the afternoon.

But as he grew still older, and still older, his memory of them faded, and the thoughts of his youth took more and more the place of it. And, getting up one night by an old man's whim to sit on the porch instead of sleeping, he saw again his boyhood's vision of the sea! There it lay, outstretched from mountain to mountain, billowy and white, the full moon in a blue sky high above it and broken patches of light, drifting clouds between. His arms reached toward it uncontrollably, and suddenly, as he stood gazing, a new and great thought came to him! He was an old man, old, old; but he would yet do what his youth had but dreamed of; he would ride on the tossing deep, that wide, wonderful sea, which had called to him when a boy!

But there was no time to lose. When it came again he must be ready. And he must be secret and silent.

In an old, unused wagon shop he found all that was necessary for the carrying out of his great plan. A few boards, some nails